What is claimed is:

1. A method for improving the effective availability of a connection between terminals over a satellite link, comprising the steps of:

a. periodically sending a heartbeat message across the connection;

b. treating failure to receive a heartbeat message within a predefined interval as a disconnect; and

c. establishing a new connection between said terminals across the satellite link in response to said disconnect.

2. The method of claim 1 in which heartbeat messages are sent by at least one terminal.

3. The method of claim 2 in which heartbeat messages are sent by both terminals participating in a connection.

4. The method of claim 1 in which the step of treating failure to received a heartbeat message within a predefined interval as a disconnect comprises the step of turning off power to a satellite terminal and reapplying power to said terminal after a predefined interval.

5. The method of claim 4 in which the step of treating failure to received a heartbeat message within a predefined interval as a disconnect further comprises the step of dialing a satellite gateway station.

6. The method of claim 4 in which the step of treating failure to received a heartbeat message within a predefined interval as a disconnect further comprises the step of dialing the number of one of said terminals participating in said connection.

7. A communications unit for sending information to a remote unit over a statellite, comprising: a processor for sending information to a remote unit over a satellite, said information comprising a heartbeat message at predetermined intervals.

8. The communications unit of claim 7, in which said information further comprises information for remotely controlling said remote unit.

9. The communications unit of claim 7, in which said processor detects failure to receive a heartbeat message from said remote unit within a predetermined time interval and reestablishes a connection to said remote unit over said satellite in response to said failure.

10. The communications unit of claim 7, in which said processor receives from said satellite information from said remote unit, comprising one of camera output and telemetry information.

11. The communications unit of claim 10, in which said processor controls display of said camera information to a user.

12. The communications unit of claim 10, in which said information further comprises information from sensors at said remote unit's location.

13. The communications unit of claim 7, in which said processor receives camera information and from said remote unit over said satellite.

14. The communications unit of claim 7, in which said processor receives remote control information from said remote unit, and uses said remote control information to control devices located at said unit.

15. The communications unit of claim 7, in which said processor sends information to a remote unit by way of a satellite ground station and a statellite.

16. The communications unit of claim 7, in which said processor is part of a computer system.

17. The communications unit of claim 7, in which said processor is firmware controlled.

18. A computer program product for improving the effective availability of a connection between terminals over a satellite link, comprising:

a. a memory medium; and

b. instructions stored on said memory medium for periodically sending a heartbeat message across the connection, for treating failure to receive a heartbeat message within a predefined interval as a disconnect; and for establishing a new connection between said terminals across the satellite link.

19. The computer program product of claim 18, in which said instructions further comprise instructions for turning off power to a satellite terminal and reapplying power to said terminal after a predefined interval.

20. The Computer Program product of claim 18, in which said instructions further comprise instructions for dialing a satellite gateway station or dialing the number of one of said terminals participating in said connection.